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NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD TELEPHONIC MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

APRIL 08, 2021

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
Over 6M Shots in the Arm – Healing Highlights of National Guard COVID Missions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Army Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch, Maryland National Guard director of joint staff and Dual-Status Commander for Title 10 Active Duty troops assigned to the Federal Pilot Community Vaccination Center in Greenbelt, Md.▪ Army Col. Larry D. Fletcher, deputy director, Office of the Joint Surgeon, National Guard Bureau▪ Air Force Col. Russell W. Kohl, commander, 131st Medical Group, Missouri National Guard▪ Army Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago, combat medic and medical section noncommissioned officer in charge, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 101st Engineer Battalion, Massachusetts National Guard▪ Army Spc. Garrett Rollag, combat medic, 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment (Airborne), Nebraska National Guard

Background:

The National Guard currently has 2,250 vaccinators at more than 1,000 fixed and mobile sites helping vaccinate our communities against COVID-19. This week, the National Guard hit the milestone of 6 million vaccinations provided to the civilian population.

Dialogue:

[Name]

[QUESTION/RESPONSE]

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:04:40] All right, folks, I know that we still are anticipating a few members of the media to join us, but I've got one o'clock and in the interest of time, I'm going to go ahead and press on. So good afternoon. Thank you for joining us for today's media roundtable, focusing on the National



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Guard COVID-19 vaccination efforts that to date have successfully assisted in vaccinating more than 6 million members of the American public. Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that this event is on the record. The National Guard has been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic response across the nation, providing support to federal, state and local authorities. Last June, 47,000 Guardsmen and women supported COVID operations, and currently more than 31,800 remain on duty, battling the pandemic in all 50 states, three territories in the District of Columbia. The depth and breadth of knowledge and skills that the National Guard brings to the COVID-19 fight is making a difference in the communities they serve ..it's truly about neighbors helping neighbors. This round table will last approximately 45 minutes. And we'll begin with opening remarks and introductions from the panel members. Today's panel includes Army Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch, Maryland National Guard Director of Joint Staff and dual status commander for Title 10 active duty troops assigned to the Federal Pilot Community Vaccination Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. Army Col Larry Fletcher, deputy director, Office of the Joint Surgeon National Guard Bureau. Air Force Col. Russell W. Kohl, commander of the 101st Medical Group, Missouri National Guard. Army Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago, Medical Section, noncommissioned officer in charge, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 101st Engineer Battalion, Massachusetts National Guard; and Army Spc. Garrett Rollag, combat medic with the 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment (Airborne), Nebraska National Guard. We'll begin with Colonel Fletcher for a national perspective.

Army Col. Larry Fletcher, deputy director, National Guard Bureau Joint Surgeon's Office

[00:06:45] Hey, thank you, Mr Hall. and good afternoon, everybody. I'm Colonel Larry Fletcher, the deputy director for the National Guard Bureau Joint Surgeon's Office. But before I get started, I do want to recognize that the news media. So earlier this week, it was national hug a news person day. But because of social distancing CDC rules, we can't hug. But we did want to at least thank you for everything that you do in supporting our free press, as well as helping us get our message out there. So thank you. But thank you also for taking the time to allow us to share the incredible work that our Army and Air National Guard members are doing to support their communities through the COVID-19 pandemic. We are proud of all of the National Guard soldiers and airmen who made it possible to administer; actually, we just reached this yesterday, over 6 million COVID vaccines to our citizens across the nation. We could not have made this happen without the support of the



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Guardsmen's families, the civilian employers and the communities. And to this we say thank you. The guard continues to work hand-in-hand with our state and federal partners to accelerate the distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines to the American public. Each vaccine administered decreases the chances of another American dying of COVID-19. And we are so humbled to be a part of this mission and to help our fellow Americans. Right now we have over 31,000 Guardsmen directly supporting COVID operations in their respective states, territories and in the District of Columbia. The National Guard is directly involved in administering at nearly 1,000 vaccine sites across 40 states. More than 2,200 National Guard medical personnel are putting shots in arms every single day. Another unique way that the Guard has supported the effort is through a mobile vaccine teams that travel around the state, they go to small, and often underserved, communities. This allows the state and the partner agencies to reach some of our most vulnerable populations. So what have we learned from this past year and from the vaccine mission? What we've learned is this has proven to be a team effort. The National Guard has partnered with FEMA, Health and Human Services, the U.S. Public Health Service, as well as our state and local governments. These partnerships ensure that we meet the mission requirements and that our friends and our neighbors, families, and that our loved ones are getting the vaccines. In fact, the commission corps of the Public Health Service within HHS may soon provide up to 600 public health service officers to work alongside our Guardsmen to provide vaccine and support vaccine operations to remote and underserved populations. We're extremely proud and are in awe, every single day at the commitment and the professionalism of our National Guardsmen. They have volunteered to put their lives, their careers, their school and their families on hold in order to serve their community, their state and this great nation. Thank you. And I look forward to your questions.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:09:58] Thank you, sir. Brigadier General Flash, would you please tell us about the efforts in Maryland?

Army Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch, Maryland National Guard director of joint staff and Dual-Status Commander for Title 10 Active Duty troops assigned to the Federal Pilot Community Vaccination Center in Greenbelt, Md. [00:10:05]

So good morning. As you stated I am Brigadier General Flasch, the director of the joint staff of the Maryland National Guard. And as of today, I'll be starting a new role as a dual status commander for an Air



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Force unit assigned here to the Community Vaccination Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. It's been a long and challenging year for the people of the state and for our nation, and for the Maryland National Guard. But it's also been a year where we can work together with local communities and we've poured every ounce of our energy into defeating COVID-19 and restoring normalcy, normalcy to our everyday lives. Today, as the 140 active-duty members, mostly Air Force members from all over our nation, come together to the Greenbelt site. We all come together in an effort to make a difference in the community. Specifically, the community in Greenbelt, focused on the social vulnerability index is a critical part of our mission to ensure that underserved populations have their needs met by this site, as we do so throughout the state of Maryland. For nearly the entire year, over 1,000 members of Maryland National Guard consistently remain on duty to combat the spread of COVID-19. Most recently, the Maryland National Guard directly administered more than 100,000 shots in arms across our state. Our Maryland National Guard troops are now supporting five mass vaccination centers and about a dozen other vaccination locations throughout Maryland, with our mobile vaccination teams. I would be remiss if I didn't also mention a teammate of mine who about two months ago, immediately after returning from D.C. as the Task Force Capitol commander, was immediately appointed by Governor Larry Hogan as our Equity Task Force commander. She has put together a tremendous capability with missions, partnering with local departments of health, community stakeholders to bridge the health outcomes divide throughout the state of Maryland. It is because of her effort in the Equity Task Force effort that our team here at Greenbelt are able to so successfully get access to this social vulnerability index communities. It is because of General Birckhead efforts that we are being successful and have had an over 60-percent rate of vaccination for community members from those underserved communities. In fact, I'll be the first Maryland National Guard member to serve as a dual status commander that in about five dollars we'll get to a good cup of coffee at Starbucks. I'll close with the basic fundamental. This is why the National Guard exists where we are virtually in every community on a daily basis. We serve our neighbors, our families in our state, we truly are citizen soldiers and airmen. And it's my pleasure to speak with you today. I look forward to your questions.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:12:52] Thank you, sir. Next, we'll go to Colonel Kohl.



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Air Force Col. Russell W. Kohl, commander, 131st Medical Group, Missouri National Guard

[00:12:57] Thank you, I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the great work of our men and women of the Missouri National Guard. Almost 1,000 troops that we have had mobilized in support of COVID for the entire past year. I think it's important to start by recognizing, though, that the rest of our work didn't stop. And so as Guardsmen, they are still accomplishing deployments and fulfilling our federal mission, which within Missouri includes the continued strategic deterrence through the protection of the Total Force Integrated B2 fleet, which is kind of a unique situation for us as we look at what we have done as a National Guard in Missouri to support COVID over the past year. There are a variety of missions that I think it's important to recognize from manning food banks - and we actually delivered meals to children during school closings; establishing and supporting COVID testing teams, both fixed facilities and mobile teams across the state. Our medical personnel were able to establish and man alternate care facilities early on during the outbreak when our local hospitals became overwhelmed and then really coordinating a whole of government planning and deployment of vaccinations across Missouri. When the state of Missouri first looked at a vaccination plan last year with the CDC, the National Guard was called up immediately to assist with that sort of planning and the logistics associated with it. And then finally supporting our federal partners. We in the National Guard, that's what we do on a daily basis to support other partners. And so we actually just earlier this week supported FEMA and the establishment of a Federal Type 2 mass vaccination event in St. Louis. And we're able to share our experience doing that over the past six months with them as they begin a large mass vaccination site. You know, I would say that it's really important to recognize the outstanding results that the Missouri National Guard has really accomplished. And I want to echo at the national level. We, as the National Guard are rapidly approaching three hundred thousand doses delivered to the citizens of Missouri. By our calculations, given the way that our mortality rate was calculated in Missouri, that's over 500 lives of Missourians that we've been able to save directly through our work as the Missouri National Guard. One of the things that I think is also particularly unique, which was mentioned, is since the very beginning, we have had a very high emphasis on health equity. We as the National Guard want to support our civilian counterparts and we recognize that the health care community has great reach and great capabilities. And so we've really focused our teams and our outstretch activities on first rural underserved areas in areas that essentially had primary care deserts and there were not local



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health infrastructure. And we've been able to move that into underserved populations, particularly in urban St. Louis and urban Kansas City, in order to really make sure that we're approaching this from a health equity perspective, which is a really strong emphasis from our governor. I would also close with just two other items before we move on to questions. One of those, as you know, as has been mentioned, where I'm a drill-status guardsman, we have a lot of drill-status guardsmen that are mobilized in support of COVID. And while you might think that it could be really hard being pulled away from folks, families and deployed across the state, one of the things that I think it is important to recognize is the impact that this has had on morale. A lot of folks actually joined the National Guard to help their fellow citizens. And this is one of the few times over my 20 years that you can directly see each day exactly the impact that you're having on folks. And so I've got to say that a lot of folks, particularly some of our aircraft maintenance guys, those sorts of things, don't always get to see immediately the impact. But having a thousand people move through a vaccination event and seeing the impact that you have has been really outstanding for our personnel. And then finally, I would just close by saying it has been a great impact for our entire state government of Missouri in that our governor at the beginning forced a very strong interagency cooperation. And I think that has actually been a great effort and will pay dividends for us in the future as we have worked right alongside every branch of government from the Department of Health, and Senior Services, State Emergency Management, down to the Missouri Department of Transportation. And so it's a great privilege for us as the Missouri National Guard to do this. We're really excited about it. And as you said at the beginning, this is a great example of neighbors helping neighbors, which is the reason that the Guard exists. Happy to take any questions. Thanks.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:17:51] Thank you, sir. Staff Sergeant Santiago, tell us a little bit about your role in the effort.

Army Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago, combat medic and medical section noncommissioned officer in charge, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 101st Engineer Battalion, Massachusetts National Guard [00:18:03] Hi there, thank you, Mr. Hall, and thanks for having me. I'm Staff Sgt. Santiago and I am the NCOIC of the medical section within the 1st Engineer Battalion. As of late November, I've had the opportunity to serve on the task force here in Boston, Massachusetts, myself and about 13 other soldiers are in the city of Brockton. Our mission here is basically to assist Brockton



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Neighborhood Health Community Center and vaccinate as many as many individuals as possible. Hopefully in later days will be able to get the entire community in here to vaccinate. And as Colonel Kohl said, it's an incredible experience for most of us being National Guardsmen. This is our home. This is our communities, our families. So it's a complete honor to be here and serve them as well. And again, thank you for having me.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:18:53] Thank you. And now, Specialist Garrett Rollag, would you please tell us a little bit about your role in this effort.

Army Spc. Garrett Rollag, combat medic, 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment (Airborne), Nebraska National Guard [00:19:01] I'm Spc. Garrett Rollag, I'm a medic with an airborne infantry battalion in the Nebraska Army National Guard. I've been in the National Guard for under three years, pretty much right after high school. Since April of 2020, I've been involved with the COVID-19 response. I was initially on a mobile testing team, did that pretty much until about July of 2020 and switched over to the civilian side until about January. Once January rolled around, I got called back up to do vaccinations through the National Guard. It's actually really, really a good time. I administered over 3,100 shots by myself. The Nebraska Army National Guard or Nebraska National Guard has administered over 50,000 since the beginning of January. Great to be in my own hometown. Doing it here in Omaha, I actually administered both doses to my grandmother. It's also been really nice seeing a bunch of other people that I know. Like I saw my high school counselor. I got to give him his vaccinations as well as a bunch of friends that I have in college and in high school as well.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:20:23] Great, thank you very much, thank you to all of our panelists. Before we begin, we respectfully ask that all participants please state their name and affiliation before asking a question. Actually, I will call on the media and also being respectful of time, we ask media, please keep it to one question and a follow up. And if time allows we'll ask for additional questions. If we are unable to answer any of your questions, will take note of it and get back to you as soon as we can after this event is done. I want to remind all members of the media we are actually recording the roundtable and we'll make that link available at a later time. And a transcript of the event will be available. And National Guard will as soon as we can get the transcript back, probably tomorrow. With



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that, we'll begin AP Lita Baldor, are you on the line and do you have a question?

Lita Baldor, Associated Press [00:21:18] Hi, yes, thanks, I. This is for general, you can probably to discuss, but can you tell me what percentage or what numbers you have so far, the numbers of actual National Guard members who have been vaccinated, one shot or two shots, and for you all who are also in your state, what are you seeing even anecdotally in terms of your members? Are they taking the shots or not? And is it a requirement at all? I know it's voluntary to get the shot, but is there a requirement or strongly encouraged of those who are actually administering or helping to administer at a number of these vaccination locations. Is it strongly suggested or required at all that they be vaccinated as they are dealing with the public? Thank you.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:22:17] Thank you, Lita. I do think that's probably best suited for Colonel Fletcher. Sir, can you address that?

Army Col. Larry Fletcher [00:22:23] Yes. Thanks for the the question. This Is Colonel Fletcher from the surgeon's office? Yeah. So to date, we have given vaccines to close to 190,000 National Guardsmen, 187,700 to be exact. We have fully vaccinated 76,450 National Guardsmen, and that's about somewhere around 18 percent of our force. And and then we have at least one dose for 111,300 individuals. Unfortunate, but I would say unfortunately is not a requirement for these it's still under EUA Emergency Use Authorization so it's not required for them to receive the vaccine. However, under the schema that was put out by CDC and by DOD, these vaccines were offered initially to all of the individuals that were supporting COVID operations in any capacity to ensure that they were the first available to receive the vaccine and in all of the other individuals were encouraged to receive the vaccine.

Army Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch [00:23:41] I'd like to do a follow up on that question real quick, it's General Flash, the requirement for members working on the community, obviously the leadership wants to ensure that every teammate we have has an opportunity to get the vaccine in, to discuss the benefits of the vaccine, both for their health and safety and that of the community. But at no time our teammates interact with the community and are not in a fully CDC approved standard of masking and gloves. And so for those members that make the choice not to, they're still whether you're vaccinated or not, any interaction with local community requires you to



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meet CDC standards. So the safety of our soldiers and airmen are paramount and equally so is the safety of the communities we're serving.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:24:32] Thank you, sir, I appreciate that, Lita. Do you have a follow up or are you OK?

Lita Baldor, Associated Press [00:24:38] No, I'll something else. Go ahead.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:24:40] OK, CBS News, do we have a representative on the line from CBS News. Nothing heard. Fox News. Nothing heard onto NBC News, are you on the line? Mosheh. Nothing heard. CNBC, Amanda, are you on the line? Nothing heard we'll go to Davis Winkie from Military Times.

Davis Winkie, Military Times [00:25:29] Hey Wayne, and thanks for all your work putting this together, Davis Winkie from Military Times, my question was for Staff Sgt. Santiago. I know that Spc. Rollag said that he had vaccinated his own grandmother. My question for you, staff sergeant is being in your community, have you vaccinated anyone you know, any family members or anything cool like that?

Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago [00:25:59] Mr. Winkie. Yes, I did, I had the opportunity of vaccinating my grandmother as well. I do live in this within this community also, and with her being 74 with comorbidities, it was very important for me to educate her on the whole vaccination process. Never mind have the opportunity to it myself. So it was it was incredible. And now we can spend time together and share those hugs and all that love without fear of her potentially contracting the virus and possibly deathly ill. So it was an honor and it was excellent. I'm happy to do so.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:26:35] Did you have a follow up, Davis?

Davis Winkie, Military Times [00:26:37] Yeah, one follow up, this could be for Santiago or Rollag. How does it feel to be on the front lines seeing this thing through after having participated in the early days as well?

Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago [00:26:51] Personally, it's wonderful we have answers to their questions, we have the ability to give them what they need to protect them, keep them safe, keep their families safe. And again, as well as educate them and instill trust in the community. And then they know that we are here. And and this isn't to divide anybody based on opinions. This is just this



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is medicine. This is science. And it's a hope for us to again, all get back to our normal lives and and hold each other again. Thank you.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:27:22] Specialist Rollag would you care to add anything?

Spc. Garrett Rollag [00:27:26] It's kind of nice because initially when I was doing a testing every now and again, someone would ask, when's the vaccine coming? When is this going to end? And it's kind of nice to at least feel like things are finally starting to have a change towards normal again, and I would just say it's good. It's a really nice relief.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:27:50] Thank you. I want to circle back to CNBC, Amanda, are you with us?

Amanda Macias, CNBC [00:27:57] Hi there, sorry. Issue with mute button. I just have two quick questions. One being as states start to open up like California, for instance, and some of these mandates come down, are you seeing any concerns from any of the Guardsmen about your efforts addressing COVID? Then there's still some federal health experts that are saying that we still need to we're not out of the dark yet. So what's sort of the guidance from the National Guard since you guys are on the front lines for this? And then my second question, if anyone can address is, are the finances in place? Are you guys still thinking that you're going to require a little bit more federal assistance in terms of getting over this pandemic?

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:28:41] I think for the first question, We'll see if Colonel Kohl can offer some perspective. Sir, you're on mute.

Col. Russell W. Kohl [00:28:53] Well, of course, it wouldn't be a teleconference if somebody wasn't speaking on mute. Thank you. It's an interesting question, you know, so in the military, we're in the business of implementing policy as opposed to designing policy. So what I would say in direct response to you, though, is that, you know, I was mobilized first to support COVID last February. And I've got to echo Sergeant Santiago and Specialist Rollag about the difference in the situation that we were in back then versus now in that sense of hopefulness for the future, that sense of recognizing that you have more tools in your tool bag that you can use for the situation. And so I think the way that I would best answer your question about what's kind of the perspective of the folks on the front lines as we see some of these things, is we recognize that there are lots of different tools that go into place in order to help us get through the



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COVID pandemic. Vaccinations are an incredibly important part of that, but that's not the only tool. And so we certainly continue to follow CDC guidelines. I think it's important for folks, regardless necessarily of what your local policies are, with regards to having to wear a mask versus not wearing a mask. We're excited to follow the CDC science that that tells us what the smart thing is to do and to continue to protect the civilians around us. So you'll still see us social distancing. You'll still see us in masks, and you'll see us trying to encourage as many folks as possible to get the vaccine, because I think it really is a multistep process for us to get through this pandemic and get back to any sort of normalcy to the extent that there will be such a thing as a normalcy as opposed to a new normal after the pandemic aspect is over.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:30:56] Thank you, sir. General Flash, do you have anything from the Maryland perspective to add?

Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch [00:31:02] No, I simply echo those comments. We are the instruments of national power, not the deciders of and what the elected leaders do at the national and local level is in the state of their decision. And as stated, you know, there's good, solid science between masking, social distancing and handwashing as a means to deny the virus a vector until we can get vaccinated. And it's just a personal experience here as we brought in Air Force, active-duty Air Force from all over the United States to serve at the Greenbelt federal site. There was a high degree of reluctance to take the vaccine. And instead of telling folks to have to do we have to ask them to consider it. And you laid the science out in front and we talked about the responsibilities we had to each other and to keep each other safe and the means to do it both through masking and social distance but also through vaccinations. And I'm pleased to report we've got a very high uptake in the number of airmen willing to take the vaccine and protect themselves, their families, and to move forward as we head towards a new standard of normal.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:32:14] Thank you, sir.

Col. Russell W. Kohl [00:32:15] And Mr. Hall, if you don't mind, I'd like to echo that point for just a second. I think it goes a little bit to the question earlier to about folks who may have hesitancy about the vaccine. You know, I'm a family physician by training, so I've given lots of speeches over the years about vaccines and the pros and the cons and the risks and all that, and what I would say is that I have not run across military personnel who were



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adamantly opposed. They simply had questions and wanted to understand. And what we're seeing, by and large, is that when we're able to provide folks with the best information and answer their questions, that they're able to make an informed decision. And that's all that we can really ask of folks and that that has been very successful across our wing.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:33:02] Thank you, sir. Amanda with regard to your second question, I'm not really sure that I understand, or that our panel members today can really address questions on funding. Can you clarify that question, please?

Amanda Macias, CNBC [00:33:15] You know, I think I'm good on there. Thanks so much for your stay healthy. And thanks so much for your time.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:33:22] OK, thank you. Moving on to Elizabeth Howe from Defense One. What are you on the line?

Elizabeth Howe, Defense One [00:33:27] I am. Can you hear me?

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:33:30] Yes.

Elizabeth Howe, Defense One [00:33:30] Thanks so much for doing this. I had a question about kind of the infection rates. I'm not sure if this information is available, but we saw a few spikes in the National Guard population specifically in late January, early February. I wanted to know if there was any sort of increase in infection based on the number of troops that are doing vaccination efforts. And if you guys are experiencing any sort of increase in infection rates among the troops that are doing vaccine operations, if there are any additional prevention measures that are being in place or if that's that's a concern that has come up and how it's being addressed. Thanks.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:34:09] Thank you, Elizabeth. I think Colonel Fletcher is probably best suited to answer that question, sir.

Col. Larry D. Fletcher [00:34:14] Yeah, just, so back in January, February, we did have a data collection issue that was reported up. And so that has since been resolved. We are not tracking any increase outside the general population and in COVID positives or deaths and as well as for those people that are out there on the front lines.



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Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:34:40] General Flasch. Do you have any comment on that as well?

Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch [00:34:46] I'll tell you something, we try very closely. Right now, our infection rate is below the state standard by several percentage points. We're somewhere up around to slightly below two percent. And it's it ebbs and flows. But again, it's not sexy as far as how to combat it. It's just simply masking, gloving and washing your hands and sanitizing the work areas, which is something we know, that's something we can continue to do a message as we continue the vaccine and arms race as much as possible.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:35:20] Thank you, sir. Elizabeth, you have a follow up?

Elizabeth Howe, Defense One [00:35:25] No, that should be all for me.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:35:26] Thank you. OK, we'll move on to Hope Seck from Military.com. Are you on the line?

Hope Seck, Military.com [00:35:33] I'm on the line, thank you so much for this helpful discussion, my question and forgive me, I'm not going to recall the speaker, but somebody mentioned the impact on morale of having this specific mission to do and seeing the direct impacts of that. Can you talk about the benchmarks by which you can say that you're seeing an improvement in roles or something with recruiting and retention or surveys? Or can you just kind of go into more detail about what you're seeing there?

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:36:12] Thank you, I think Colonel Kohl might be able to address that and then General Flasch may have some comments to add as well.

Col. Russell W. Kohl [00:36:18] Yeah, so I would say I don't have the benchmarks yet, you know, those surveys that we do within the units are done on an annual basis. And so I would expect over the next few months we'll be able to see what that actually looks like over a year to year basis. But what I've based that discussion on is basically walking among the troops. And so we have 33 different active teams across Missouri. And by nature of the job that I'm doing, I see most of them. And so I have the opportunity to generally be from six to eight different events all across the state on an almost weekly basis. And I will tell you that when I talk to a young airman about what it is that they're seeing and what it is that they're doing, they're tired. They're hungry. Sometimes they would like to go home or just sit down after having stood on a parking lot for a very long amount of time during the day. But without a doubt, every one of them ultimately smiles, looks



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at me and says, you know, this is what I actually got into the Guard for. I will throw one other item on there. So our Army colleagues, at least in Missouri, we have a lot of flooding on an annual basis. And so a lot of our Army colleagues get to use their military skills on an annual basis for state emergency duty. A stealth bomber mechanic is not generally called upon to have a state emergency duty, but that has not been the case. We've been able to let folks actually see how they can help their neighbors. We really focused on logistics and support with the National Guard. Our medical folks are, by and large medical folks in the civilian world. And so us pulling in our doctors and nurses in the Guard would have actually harmed our community. We would have been pulling away the civilian providers who needed our help. But what we were able to do is to take folks that were not necessarily engaged in the civilian medical community and make them really force multipliers. And that's the exciting thing for them, is to be able to look and see that, hey, you know, when I finished my tech school for for being a B-2 maintenance guy, I didn't think I was going to be able to help on state emergency duty. But it turns out I am and I'm able to see this make a difference. So that's that's the only metric I've got right now is the leadership my walking around survey.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:38:50] Thank you, sir. General Flasch, do you have anything you'd like to add?

Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch [00:38:54] Yes, so our the metrics for our retention is we track on a monthly basis get fed up to both army and air leadership, and we've exceeded our retention goals for last fiscal year and we also exceeded our recruiting goals last fiscal year. And that's the macro level. But I would like to give our our two soldiers an opportunity to tell the truth. There's nothing worse than a general quoting statistics when you've got two real live teammates on the line who are the very people that I would love to keep in uniform for a career. So I'd like to yield my time to them.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:39:31] Absolutely, sir. Thank you, Sergeant Santiago and Specialist Rollag anything else you'd like to add to that.

Spc. Garrett Rollag [00:39:41] Sure, she can go first.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:39:47] I think he's going to defer to you,



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Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago [00:39:50] Yes, being in the National Guard, we have a whole life outside of this. We do, but for most of us, we do drill on the weekends, especially the younger soldiers who didn't have a chance to maybe support Operation Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom. So this is something that they get to do versus a simulated training event or a notional training event. This is real life. So when you even growing up, you have that question of how can somebody do this? Could you do that? Well, why am I doing this? Well, now they have that. Why all this training, all this education is for a reason. It's for exactly what we're doing right here. So to touch upon the morale, I don't think any of my soldiers on this team have come in without a smile or without the passion and compassion to be here. And if they are having a tough day, if they're a little homesick or whatnot, that smile on that person's face, if they just vaccinated that that bit of hope that that individual feels for their a better future, I think flip's that maybe cranky morning self back to a happy afternoon self ... that's all I got for you.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:40:58] Thank you, Specialist Rollag, anything you'd like to add about the morale that you've the impact on morale, that this mission's had for you?

Spc. Garrett Rollag [00:41:07] So I, I really enjoy the recovery mission. Actually, you get a lot of people, you know, thanking you for it. Every now and again, you get you get someone they're really emotional about it because they're happy that they don't really have to fear the virus as much as they did, especially if they're predisposed. And it's also really nice because I'm going to school right now as a emergency management major. And this mission in itself actually helps me gain experience for any sort of future employment. Currently, I'm slated to have orders up until the end of May, actually extend that depending on school. But I really I really do enjoy this mission and I enjoy the other soldiers and other airmen that are on my team. I really do enjoy this mission. I'm glad that I have the privilege to serve on this mission.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:42:16] Thank you very much. We'll now move on to Cory Dickstein from Stars and Stripes. Are you with us?

Corey Dickstein, Stars and Stripes [00:42:21] I am, thank you. Just a quick one for the vaccinators on the panel, just kind of following up on what Specialist RRollag just was talking about. Can you give an example of kind of over-the-top emotional reactions you guys have seen from people and kind of



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generally just how we're, you know, what are people like when they get especially probably to that second dose?

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:42:53] Garrett, or Specialist Rollag, would you like to go first?

Spc. Garrett Rollag [00:42:55] Yeah, sure. I've seen a lot of people will kind of choke up a little bit when you ask all the questions. And then usually once the shot is finished, they'll be a little bit teary eyed and you always kind of ask and make sure everything's OK. Unfortunately, I have had this happen a few times where it's been someone who is getting a shot to actually attend the funeral of someone who had passed away from COVID. A few times that's what I've seen. Also, it's just people that are really happy that they get to go visit family again. I've had a lot of elderly people that are like, oh, I can finally go visit my children and my grandchildren again. Oftentimes it's usually out of state and somewhere that's a little bit more of a hotter area than Nebraska. And this is really, really kind of gratifying to see that that reaction out of people.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:44:07] Thank you. That was moving .. Sergeant Santiago, anything like that?

Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago [00:44:14] I'll piggyback off of Specialist Rollag over here it's very emotional experiences for a lot of them, especially in the Brockton community. We have a lot of individuals from different countries and or underserved, underdeveloped populations here as well. So the fact that they have the opportunity to be vaccinated here it's incredible for them. They're very gratuitous. They get to, again, go to their countries, go see their families, be together again. The appreciation is I can't even put a put a word to it. I mean, even little treats that they come in on their second vaccine. You gave me your first vaccine. I thought of you when I saw this in the store and they'll give you a little prayer cards or, you know, little little trinkets just to remember you. They want you to remember them. It's it's it's beautiful.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:45:04] Thank you very much. Moving on in the interest of time. Do we have Rebecca Kirkman with us? Rebecca. Nothing heard Mosheh from NBC. Have you joined? Susan Phillips from WUSA, have you joined? Nothing heard, and with that, I think I've been through my oh, Ellen Mitchell from The Hill. Are you here? Ellen, are you able to come off mute?



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Ellen Mitchell, The Hill [00:45:53] Yes, no question at this time. Thank you.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:45:56] OK, thank you. I think I've been through my list. Is there anybody else on the line who has a question or would like to offer up another question?

Hope Seck, Military.com [00:46:09] I've got a quick one, and I don't know if it's answerable or not, but is there any sense of timeline in terms of when you all might be mission complete? This is Hope Seck of Military.com.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:46:23] Hope that's that may be too premature, but I will let the panel, if there's anybody on the panel who has any thoughts on that.

Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch [00:46:34] I got that same question this morning from Congressman Steny Hoyer and I and I'll give the same answer. It should be conditions based. It should be clear that we're not needed anymore. And that's when the mission is over. I think that'll be up to each governor to determine what the conditions are in their states, to determine when the Guard can hand over responsibility to the local authorities. And if the intention is, is to use the Guard as a bridging strategy until the private sector medical system can catch up. I don't like giving dates. That's the quickest way that generals get fired. So I'll tell you, when the people are well off, the vaccinations have taken hold and we've achieved a level of protection in our society that the standard systems that protect them are able to keep up. I think that will be the moment we can all high fives, maybe hug a little bit and have a barbecue.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:47:28] Very well put. Sir, thank you very much. Any other reporters on the line with the initial question before we draw to a close?

Davis Winkie, Military Times [00:47:37] Got one Wayne.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:47:37] Davis. Go ahead, please.

Davis Winkie, Military Times [00:47:40] Hey, it's Davis Winkie military times again. I believe it was Colonel Kohl who had said earlier that he'd been on since February. Is that a continuous, unbroken period of orders since February?

Col. Russell W. Kohl [00:47:56] No, fortunately, it was there was a break in there once we established our testing programs than those of us and more of an administrative role actually demobilized. We went back to our civilian jobs for a while. And



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then as the vaccinations started to achieve their aims and we started to see that that program was going to be able to be rolled out, we were brought back on to conduct those sorts of planning and operations. So it's been it's been a break.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:48:28] Thank you, sir. Alright with that, ladies and gentlemen, will offer panel members, an opportunity for any closing remarks before we before we close things out. General, anything you'd like to add?

Brig. Gen. Adam Flasch [00:48:44] I'd like to thank the staff sergeant and the specialist for their commitment to our Guard. It is soldiers and airmen like them every day that are making a difference in our community. I'd like to continue to just remind everybody that, you know, cliché as it is, we're in this together and being kind and patient with each other is probably the best way to get to a more perfect union. Get to a place where grandparents can see grandkids. People feel safe again. We can all sit in the same room and breathe the same air and not worry. Are we doing something or someone else doing something that might put us in a situation where we get ill? And and and I would just continue to thank our press for reporting on the things we're doing and in holding our government accountable. That's a unique responsibility here and in a democratic society, one that is absolutely critical to ensure that our citizens are the focus of our government. And with that, I'll turn it over.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:49:48] Thank you, sir. Colonel Fletcher, are you with us and you have any closing comments?

Col. Larry D. Fletcher [00:49:53] Yeah. I also like to just, you know, Echo General Flasch and just thank you for taking the time to give us a chance to tell our story. I think it's a great story. You know, we are so, so proud of all of our soldiers, all of our airmen for the commitment that they make to their communities. And we look forward to future media engagements where we can continue to tell the story as we continue to support the states over.

w [00:50:17] Thank you, sir. Colonel Kohl, any closing comments for you?

Col. Russell W. Kohl [00:50:21] Yeah, my primary comment in closing would be, you know, over the time I've been in the military, I've served in Iraq, Afghanistan, the evacuation of Katrina, but there there have not been events over that entire career where I haven't been as or I have been as just daily reminded of how important it is, what we do in the National Guard. And



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so I just really have to reiterate the value that exists both for the communities and for us as guardsmen to be able to help our neighbors. Our goal has always been neighbors helping neighbors and to be defense support to civil authorities. And so we've been privileged to provide that support. And the great thing about that is we'll still be here even when you send us home. So the question was asked earlier, what does end of mission look like for the National Guard? There's never been an end of mission. We finish one mission, we go home, we go back to our civilian jobs. But the next time our community needs us, we're right here again. And you just call us and we'll be right back. So it's been a great privilege and I'm really excited that gave us the opportunity to talk about the great work that our men and women are doing to thank you.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:51:34] Thank you, sir, Sergeant Santiago any closing comments?

Staff Sgt. Shavonne Santiago [00:51:43] General Flasch, thank you for the opportunity. No, thank you necessary from us, we're happy to be here and truly honored. Thank you.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:51:52] And Specialist Rollag anything else you'd like to add?

Spc. Garrett Rollag [00:51:57] Just thank you for having me on here. I don't really have a whole lot to add I actually got to run back and I'm actually in the back room of one of our clinics right now. So I just gotta run back there after this and keep doing more shots, so.

Wayne Hall (Moderator) [00:52:11] All right, thank you very much. So I'd like to thank our participants and guests for joining us this afternoon. And to the members of the media, if you have any additional questions, please do follow up with us by email. And as I said earlier, we did record the event. It will be available later and we'll make that available as well as a transcript of the of the roundtable was the transcript is complete. Thank you very much. And that will end our event for today.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 52 minutes

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